

Conservation

Water District Measure Defeated Thank You for Voting NO on the Measure and Saying YES to Protecting Portland's Environment

by Bob Sallinger, Conservation Director

On May 20th, the Portland Water District Measure (26-156) went down to a 40 percentage point defeat. The measure, which would have taken control of Portland's Water Bureau and Environmental Services away from the City and turned them over to a new board, was opposed by Portland Audubon and a large broad coalition of conservation, community, labor, and business groups. The initiative was funded by a small group of industrial interests and never attracted a single endorsement from a community group between the time it was announced and its defeat 10 months later. However, fueled by a few very large corporate donations, it managed to gather enough signatures to narrowly make it onto the ballot and then aggressively purchase robocalls, mailers, and commercials. It was Audubon's top priority during the spring to ensure that this measure did not pass.

The defeat of this measure was a win for Portland's environment. The backers repeatedly targeted the City's most important environmental programs for attack. They also went after conservation and community groups that partner with the City on neighborhood-based environmental projects such as planting trees, replacing parking lots with bioswales, and monitoring the health of our environment. The same people who backed this measure have also sued the City, asserting that regulations that protect our river, programs that protect our floodplains, and programs that green our neighborhoods are illegal. They chose to make this a referendum on Portland's commitment to the environment — and the voters resoundingly rejected these attacks.

Over the past 20 years, Portland has led the nation in recognizing that building with nature not only improves the health of our environment, but it also saves taxpayers and ratepayers money. "Green Infrastructure" is the term *de rigueur*, but what it means is simply that rather than spending massive amounts of money to build, rebuild, and expand pipe systems to dispose of rainwater, instead we treat rain as an amenity and utilize soil and vegetation to treat rainwater where it falls.

Historically, Portland, like most cities, tried to put our rainwater into pipes and treated it much like sewage, an approach that led to a variety of expensive and ecologically destructive results including flooding along Johnson Creek, landslides in the West Hills, and more than 50 combined sewer overflows which sent more than 6 billion gallons of raw sewage into the Willamette River each year.

Today the City is building smarter, greener, and cheaper. We have led the nation in utilizing green strategies such as tree planting, green roofs, bioswales, and protecting stream corridors and floodplains to absorb our rain — projects that clean our air and water, provide access to nature for even our most urban neighborhoods, provide fish and wildlife habitat, reduce urban heat island effects, sequester CO₂, and prevent landscape hazards. These projects also save our communities incredible amounts of money. One example: faced with a 100-year-old failing pipe system between Mt Tabor and the Willamette River, the City saved more than \$60 million for ratepayers by incorporating green strategies to address rainwater rather than simply replacing every pipe.



Green Strategies such as this OHSU Ecoroof allow our city to absorb rainwater like a sponge and create huge environmental benefits while saving ratepayers money. © Bob Sallinger



Bioswales such as this one collect stormwater from our streets, preventing neighborhood and basement flooding, reducing pollution in our rivers, calming traffic, and saving ratepayers money. © Mike Houck

These types of projects also directly involve communities and nonprofits in improving the health of our neighborhoods, and leverage limited City dollars many times over. One example is the City's Community Watershed Stewardship Program (CWSP) which gives out small grants to underserved communities and has invested just under \$1 million total over the past 18 years. In return these grants have generated nearly \$4 million in matching funds and engaged over 44,000 volunteers who have donated more than 343,000 volunteer hours. Not a bad return on investment — and exactly the type of civic engagement we need to maintain transparent, inclusive, and responsive government programs.

There are plenty of challenges at Portland Bureau of Environmental Services and the Water Bureau and throughout all of our City programs: that is the nature of the beast. Portland Audubon will continue to work with the City wherever possible and fight for reform whenever necessary. Measure 26-156, however, went after the wrong things in the wrong way as it would have made government even more accessible to rich and powerful corporate interests, and would have undermined some of our most important environmental programs. Thank you for voting No!

Audubon Opposes Slaughter of Double-crested Cormorants on East Sand Island

by Bob Sallinger 503/292-9501 x 110

On June 12, 2014, the US Army Corps of Engineers announced plans to kill 16,000 Double-crested Cormorants on East Sand Island near the mouth of the Columbia River. This slaughter represents approximately 50% of the breeding colony that currently exists on East Sand Island, which represents approximately 39% of the total breeding population of Double-crested Cormorants west of the Rocky Mountains. Why does the Corps want to kill this species that Aristotle once referred to as the "water raven"? For the crime of doing what comes naturally: eating fish.

East Sand Island is a remarkable place. Historically no more than a shifting sandbar, the US Army Corps of Engineers stabilized the island and used it to deposit dredge spoils during the 1940s into the 1980s. Today the island encompasses nearly 60 acres and is home to an incredible assortment of birds including the largest breeding colony of Caspian Terns in the world (10,700 breeding pairs at its peak in 2008), the largest breeding colony of Double-crested Cormorants in North America (15,000 breeding pairs in 2013), and the largest post-breeding roost site for Brown Pelicans (more than 10,000 individuals) on the West Coast. The island has been recognized as an officially designated Important Bird Area (IBA) by both National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy.

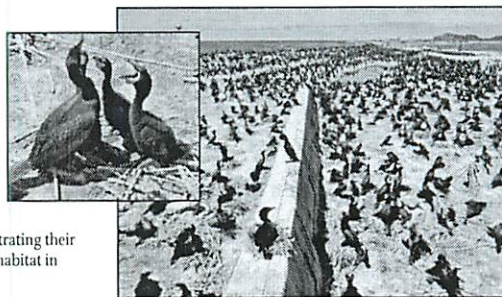
The birds have congregated on this island in large part because humans have both intentionally and unintentionally concentrated them there. The Caspian Terns first began nesting on East Sand Island in the 1980s attracted by nesting opportunities on Corps dredge spoils and ample forage fish to eat. In the 1990s the colony relocated to Rice Island further up the estuary, but was subsequently hazed off Rice Island and returned to East Sand Island using social attraction techniques (audio calls and decoys). The Corps and NOAA Fisheries were concerned about tern consumption of federally listed salmon and steelhead smolts. However, the same listed fish species also pass East Sand Island and as the colony continued to grow, the same concerns about predation were reasserted. Over the past decade the Corps has spent millions of dollars trying to restrict tern nesting opportunities on East Sand Island while simultaneously

creating new islands for them in places as far away as Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. The results have been mixed at best — many of the new islands have failed to establish significant breeding populations and the terns on East Sand Island have defied expectations by concentrating their breeding colony in their increasingly restricted habitat in numbers far beyond what models predicted.

The population explosion of Double-crested Cormorants on East Sand Island coincides with declines in colonies elsewhere. Reviled by many interests throughout their range for eating commercially valuable fish, they have been legally and illegally chased out of many of their historic colonies. Like the terns, they too found good habitat and lots to eat on East Sand Island. The species is actually declining throughout much of its western range. Almost all of the overall population growth of Double-crested Cormorants in the West is due to one breeding colony: East Sand Island.

Unlike the terns, however, the Corps is not proposing to relocate the cormorants. They don't tend to relocate as far away as terns and nobody wants them. Agencies up and down the coast are submitting their own permit applications to kill cormorants for the crime of eating fish. Instead the Corps proposed to kill nearly 16,000 birds. Shotguns will be used to kill them over water. Rifles with silencers will be used on the island both at day and potentially at night with the use of infrared goggles. The killing occurs over four nesting seasons. In phase two of this process their habitat would be altered, and continued taking of eggs would be allowed to ensure that their colony did not expand again.

The East Sand Island Double-crested Cormorant plan represents lethal control of a native wildlife species at a historic and horrific scale. The cormorants have been caught in a growing web of manipulation and lethal control of native wildlife species being done in the name of protecting salmon. Farther upriver, the Corps is already killing cormorants and sea lions. Millions of public dollars have been spent trying to relocate terns, with marginal results. The fish and birds have coexisted since time immemorial.



Double-crested Cormorant colony and begging chicks on East Sand Island © Joe Liebszell

In fact, biologists estimate that Double-crested Cormorant populations in the West today are as much as an order of magnitude smaller than historic populations.

It is time to stop scapegoating birds for salmon and steelhead declines that were caused by people. Audubon Society of Portland strongly opposes this proposal and urges its members to oppose it as well. It is time for the US Army Corps to do a ground-up review of its entire approach to managing birds in the Columbia Estuary. The focus should be on addressing the primary causes of salmon decline: dam operation and habitat loss. It should also be on managing hatchery fish, which make up a significant portion of the salmon consumed by the cormorants (the Draft EIS estimates 50%, but that is likely a very conservative number). The birds are not part of the problem. They are part of the intricate web of life that needs to be protected.

In the coming weeks, we will be mobilizing our members to send a strong message of opposition to the Corps. Watch our website or sign up to be on our activist list to stay informed.

There will be a public hearing in Portland on July 10th from 2:30pm–5:30pm at the Matt Dishman Community Center, 77 NE Knott St, Portland.

To see the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and how to comment, go to: www.nwp.usace.army.mil/Media/Announcements/tabid/1887/Article/23921/draft-eis-double-crested-cormorant-plan-to-reduce-predation-of-juvenile-salmon.aspx.

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East Sand Island



Double-crested Cormorants on East Sand Island - Joe Liebezeit

East Sand Island is a remarkable place. Historically no more than a shifting sandbar, the US Army Corps of Engineers stabilized the island and used it to deposit dredge spoils from the 1940s into the 1980s. Today the island encompasses nearly 60 acres and is home to an incredible assortment of birds.

The island includes the largest breeding colony of Caspian Terns in the world, with 10,700 breeding pairs at the colony's peak in 2008; the largest breeding colony of Double-crested Cormorants in North America, with 15,000 breeding pairs in 2013; and the largest post-breeding roost site for Brown Pelicans on the West Coast, made up of more than 10,000 individual birds. The island has been officially designated as an Important Bird Area by both the National Audubon Society and American Bird Conservancy.

The birds congregate on the island because it provides good nesting habitat and a steady source of fish to feed on. They also congregate there because they have been driven out of other traditional nesting areas due to concerns about fish predation. In the 1990s, the Corps deliberately relocated a Caspian Tern nesting colony to the island, and the rise in the cormorant population is tied to declines in other tern nesting colonies up and down the West Coast.

Today the island is mired in controversy. Studies demonstrate that the cormorants and terns are consuming varying amounts of salmon and steelhead listed under the Endangered Species Act. However, the birds and fish have coexisted since time immemorial. The declines in salmon and steelhead are related to dams, habitat loss and fish hatcheries. Over the past two decades, the Audubon Society of Portland has worked to ensure that the critically important bird colonies on East Sand Island are well managed and not used as scapegoats for manmade declines in salmon and steelhead runs.

Action Alert: Stop the Cormorant Slaughter on East Sand Island

June 27, 2014: We need your help to stop the cormorant slaughter on East Sand Island.

The US Army Corps of Engineers has announced it intends to kill more than 16,000 Double-crested Cormorants on East Sand Island at the mouth of the Columbia River. The Corps will be using shotguns to kill the birds over water, and rifles with night vision scopes and silencers to shoot the birds on the island's nesting grounds. The East Sand Island colony represents 39 percent of the total breeding population of Double-crested Cormorants west of the Rocky Mountains. Why does the Corps want to kill these birds? For doing what comes naturally, eating fish.

The Corps has already spent millions of dollars trying to manipulate birds on East Sand Island. Now they are proposing lethal control on a historic and horrific scale.

The Audubon Society of Portland strongly opposes this proposal and urges its members to oppose it as well. It is time for the US Army Corps to do a ground-up review of its entire approach to managing birds in the Columbia Estuary. The focus for recovering salmon on the Columbia River should be on addressing the primary causes of salmon decline - dam operation and habitat loss - not on killing thousands of birds that have co-existed with salmon since time immemorial.

East Sand Island is home to the largest Caspian Tern colony in the world, the largest Double-crested Cormorant colony in the western United States, and the largest Brown Pelican roost in the Pacific Northwest. The island has been designated as an internationally recognized Important Bird Area by both Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy.

How You Can Help

Send an email: Please let the Corps know that you oppose the slaughter of cormorants on East Sand Island by sending them an email at cormorant-eis@usace.army.mil. Key messages are listed below.



Donate: Please make a donation to support our efforts to protect East Sand Island cormorants from this horrific lethal control.

Key Messages

- Let the Corps know that you strongly oppose the lethal control of birds on East Sand Island;
- Urge the Corps to focus on manmade causes of salmon decline including dams, habitat loss and hatcheries;
- Let them know that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is inadequate because it fails to adequately address issues such as compensatory mortality, hatchery fish and wildly fluctuating salmon returns, and provides inadequate research on cormorant dispersal patterns if non-lethal alternatives were adopted;
- Let the Corps know that you are concerned that Double-crested Cormorant populations are already estimated to be an order of magnitude lower than they were historically and that populations in the west outside of East Sand Island are declining.

More Information

Related documents:

- Draft Environmental Impact Statement

- July 2014 Audubon letter to USACOE requesting extension on Cormorant EIS Comment Period
- In-depth article about lethal control of East Sand Island cormorants by Bob Sallinger
- Framework for the Management of Double-crested Cormorant Depredation of Fish Resources in the Pacific Flyway

Letters from other groups opposing lethal control of East Sand Island cormorants:

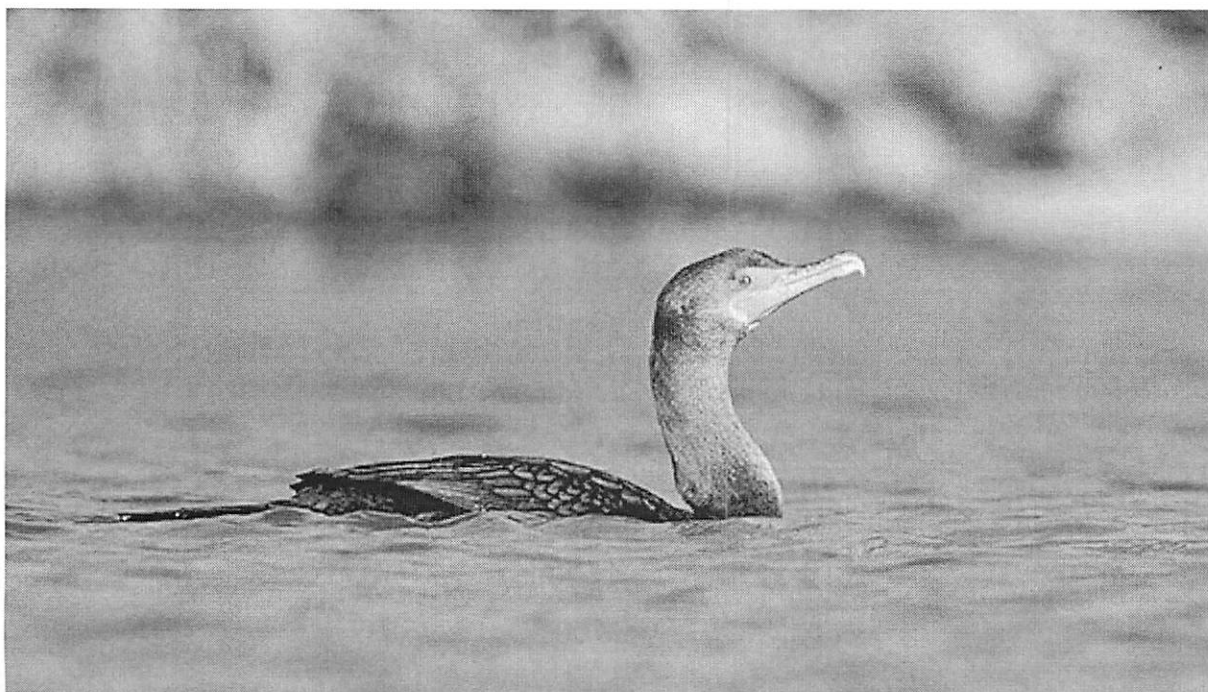
- Kalmiopsis Audubon Society

Media coverage:

- "A Debate On The Proposed Killing Of Cormorants To Save Salmon" | OPB, July 2014

Previous Audubon comments on US Army Corps activities on East Sand Island:

- Feb. 18, 2014: Audubon Society of Portland Comments on Caspian Tern Environmental Assessment
- April 26, 2013: Oregon Audubon Chapters and National Audubon Society Comments on Draft Environmental Assessment-Adaptively Manage Predation on Caspian Terns in the Lower Columbia River Estuary
- Dec. 21, 2012: Audubon Society of Portland Comments on US Army Corps of Engineers Proposed Environmental Impact Statement for Potential Reduction of Double-crested Cormorants
- Oct. 11, 2011: Letter to US Fish and Wildlife Service Regarding the East Sand Island Double-crested Cormorant Research Proposal



Double-crested Cormorant - Scott Carpenter

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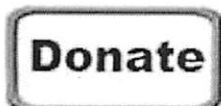
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Double-crested Cormorant - Scott Carpenter